

News

Times Square gives recruiters unique challenge

CPL. BETH ZIMMERMAN
NEW YORK PUBLIC AFFAIRS

“A guy weighing about 280 pounds walked in here with a loaded gun once,” said Marine Corps Recruiter Staff Sgt. Marco Cordero. “He sat down and wouldn’t leave. He kept saying he was ‘the real 50 cent,’ and that he had to lay low from the cops for a while.”

So, one of the recruiters from the Armed Forces Recruiting Station in Times Square, N.Y., nonchalantly walked out of the recruiting station and across the street to the police station.

As the cops surrounded the station and arrested the gun-brandishing visitor, Cordero couldn’t help but think to himself, “... only in New York.”

Located in the heart of New York City, the Times Square Armed Forces Recruiting Station never really has a “typical” day. Its location and notoriety make it one of the most interesting duty assignments in the Marine Corps.

Times Square itself is formed by the angle of Broadway intersecting 7th Avenue between West 42nd and 47th Streets, though the name also applies to the general surrounding area. The station sits on a small traffic island between Broadway and 7th Ave., and it has the best view of the chaos that’s synonymous with Times Square.

“There isn’t a better place to work,” said Gunnery Sgt. Alexander Kitsakos, a Brooklyn native. Kitsakos is a double Centurion (more than 200 enlistees), and he worked on Extended Active Duty as a recruiter in Times Square from 1995 to 1997.

Marines have represented the Corps in Times Square since the building opened in 1946 and the Corps is careful with who they give that responsibility to.

“The type of person put in Times Square has to be positive,” said Sgt. Maj. Fenton Reese, sergeant major, Recruiting Station New York. “You have to have a positive

attitude and a great image.” “Image is everything,” said Reese. “Recruiters look good anyway, but [for Times Square] we need a razor-sharp Marine who can also deal with the public,” he said. “There are people there of all races and nationalities, and it’s fast-paced. We need a Marine who can relate to them.”

Cordero has represented the Corps for two years. With 1st Marine Corps District’s Recruiter of the Year title under his belt, he’s done his share of relating.

“You have to deal with a lot of people here, with a lot of different personalities and backgrounds,” said Cordero. “I’ve learned how to deal with all of them.”

The diversity comes from the fact that not all of the applicants are from the immediate surrounding area. “The contracts [from Times Square] come from all over,” said Staff Sgt. Amanda Hay, RS New York Marketing and Public Affairs Representative. “There’s only been a couple of contracts from Times Square that were actually from midtown Manhattan.”

Brooklyn native Pavel Sanchez is one of the many applicants from another borough who traveled to Times Square.

“My friend told me about the station...so I decided to come out here,” he said. Sanchez enlisted in the Delayed Entry Program in January, and he leaves for recruit training in March.

The Marine Corps isn’t the only recruiting presence in the square. The 520-square-foot station is also home to recruiters from the Army, Navy and Air Force. Each recruiter has one cubicle, which, along with a small bathroom in the back of the station, is about all the station has room for. The station, which the recruiters call “the booth,” was renovated in 1998 and re-dedicated in 1999. For more than 50 years before the re-dedication, the recruiters didn’t



Cpl. Beth Zimmerman

The Armed Forces Recruiting Station in Times Square has been a part of New York City since 1946. The building was renovated and re-dedicated in 1999, and it sits on a small traffic island in between Broadway and 7th Avenue.

even have a bathroom.

“You had to make friends very quickly in order to use the bathroom,” said Kitsakos, who left just before the renovation. He and the other recruiters made friends at a nearby theater, and would walk down the block to use the restroom there. But, some things never changed.

“The recruiters [from all of the services] really worked together,” he said. “If one of the recruiters had an applicant come in for anything, another recruiter would help out if the recruiter wasn’t there.”

Seven years after Kitsakos worked at the station, Cordero said the teamwork between the services is still the highlight of working there.

“What makes this fun is that we all get along,” said the Washington Heights, N.Y., native. “If I’m not here and someone walks in to find out more about the Marines, then whoever is here will sit down and talk to him about the Marines.”

“We’re all in one room here, and we work with each other every day,” said Army Staff Sgt. Dennis Kelly. “So it’s easy to just work together.”

Both realize that the same teamwork may not apply at other recruiting stations, but it works well for them. All four of the recruiters in the small Times Square station earned “Recruiter of the Year” titles.

“The visibility the recruiters get from the public is both good and bad,” said Hay. Famous music artists, models and actors

visit the station unannounced.

“Even P. Diddy was here hanging out with us in front of the station one day,” said Kelly.

Other visitors are less welcome. Anti-war protesters have targeted the station in the past. “The protesters don’t really affect the recruiters ... it’s just business as usual,” said Hay.

Actually, protests offer an

opportunity for the recruiters to show off how well they relate to people. During one protest, “people handcuffed themselves to the flag pole,” said Cordero. “So, once they were handcuffed, I went out and handed my business card out to their free hands.”

According to RS New York operational statistics, the RS contracted more than 1,300 applicants last fiscal year. “A significant portion [of those contracts] come from Manhattan,” said Reese. “We couldn’t sustain our mission without Manhattan.”

The location of the station combined with hard work provides those numbers. “There’s always a lot of traffic there,” said Kitsakos. “Combining the walk-ins with plenty of good, old-fashioned, area canvassing can make a recruiter successful.”

The same factors that can make a day successful also create an intense atmosphere. “It’s like Wall Street in here sometimes,” said Cordero. “There’s so much to handle in such little time.”

For Marines willing to handle the pressure of recruiting in Times Square, Hay said the challenge is worth it. “The recruiters get lots of VIP status and visits from famous people. I would say Times Square is the most exciting place to be as a Marine.”

A visit from Down Under ...



Lance Cpl. Brian Kester

Vice Adm. Chris Ritchie, Chief of Navy, Royal Australian Navy, converses about recruit training with Col. Michael Malachowsky, Depot Chief of Staff, at the Depot Crucible Command Post Monday. Along with visiting MCAS Beaufort, Vice Adm. Ritchie had lunch with several recruits, toured the drill instructor school and caught a glimpse of The Crucible.

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